

Connections:



Photo by David Ruskey

Above: Professor Chuck Stone speaks at the start of Ally Week.

Ally Week started off with a bang on Jan. 31 outside the Student Union. Volunteers distributed food, buttons and pamphlets; speeches

were heard from Vice Chancellor Peggy Jablonski, Professor Chuck Stone and a prepared statement was read from Bernadette Gray-Little, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences.

That evening, the local chapter of Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) held its monthly meeting in Carmichael Residence Hall. Thirty-six students, parents and staff members spanning the spectrum of sexual orientations exchanged stories and discussed what the ally and queer communities can do for each other. Participants shared their thoughts on open-ended prompts such as "A good ally..." Separate cards were distributed to LGBTIQ-identified individuals and allies to spark conversation.

The festivities continued Feb. 1 with the GLBT-SA's annual Student Body President Forum. Pressing topics such as LGBTIQ theme housing and gender neutral bathrooms were raised, as were past issues such as Alpha Iota Omega's lawsuit against UNC, last semester's Kiss-In and the Elyse Crystall incident. Tom Jensen garnered some cheers from GLBT-SA members after claiming that he would willingly kiss another male in the Pit for the next Kiss-In.

The first event on Feb. 2 was a

Super-SHAH (Social Hour and a Half) sponsored by the LGBTQ Office. For about 90 minutes, queers and allies casually chatted over light snacks. LGBTQ 101 followed, drawing a crowd of some 20 students. Matching games involving different symbols in the LGBTIQ community were played and the origins of these symbols were discussed.

The week's main event, the Ally Panel, took place before the regularly scheduled GLBT-SA general body meeting Feb. 3. Two student allies and Assistant Dean of Students Melinda Manning spoke about the importance and pressures of being an ally.

They also discussed what made them decide to become involved with the LGBTIQ community. A statement was also prepared by sociology graduate student Natalia Deeb-Sossa and read by student ally Sarah Trumble, the evening's facilitator. The meeting was followed by a question and answer session.

The weekend brought a queer film festival with several LGBT-themed movies. The first to be shown were "Fire," a controversial film about a lesbian love affair in India, and "The Edge of Seventeen," a gay teenager's coming of age story set in the late 1980s. "Sunday Bloody Sunday," the story of a love triangle between a gay man, a straight woman and a bisexual man, and "Ma Vie en Rose," the tale of a transgender youth, were shown Feb. 5.

The week concluded Feb. 7 when former United Methodist Minister Jimmy Creech spoke to students about his experiences as an ally. Creech explained how his preconceived prejudices against

homosexuality were shattered when a fellow minister came out to him after being forced out of the church due to his sexual orientation. Creech immediately began doing historical and biblical research and came to the conclusion that homosexuality and Christianity do not conflict. He then became an advocate of LGBTIQ rights to the extent of performing same-gender unions, costing him his congregation and his ministry. Creech is working with the progressive organization Soulforce to promote equality for everyone.

Jason Wang, coordinator of the planning committee for Ally Week, said he was happy with the attention brought to the need for unity between the queer community and its straight allies.

"I'm proud that Ally Week helped bring new people into (the) GLBT-SA," said Wang. "It helped us all realize how important it is for LGBTQ folk and their allies to stand together."



Photo by Clarisse Rodriguez

Above: Robin Allen, left, and first-year student Brittany Wofford at a PFLAG meeting.